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ABSTRACT

This paper considers whether the involvement of student teachers with disabilities in clinical settings indicates a need for accommodations as mandated under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. It stresses the importance of identification and involvement of all stakeholders and a structure for implementing the entire student teaching process. It briefly describes four court cases directly relevant to decisions about student teachers with disabilities and offers a conceptualization of disabilities and provisions. Stakeholders in the student teaching process are specifically identified and the need for adequate preparation is stressed. Pre-support activities such as identifying accommodations that will or will not transfer into clinical settings are discussed. This is followed by consideration of support needs during the actual student teaching experience. Also considered are monitoring and evaluation activities. Finally, performance outcomes are discussed in terms of standards for success and failure. (DB)

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ACCOMMODATING STUDENT TEACHERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Georgia Association of Teacher Educators

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Atlanta, Georgia

October 18, 2001
2:40 - 3:30

Presented by:
Wayne Akins, Director of Office of Disabilities
Georgia Southern University

Cindi Chance, Dean, College of Education
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AGENDA

ACCOMMODATING STUDENT TEACHERS

WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

2:40 - 3:30p.m.

Session Overview ..... Cindi Chance

Student Teaching Overview ..... Fred Page

Accessibility and Case Law ..... Wayne Akins

Stakeholders ..... Wayne Akins

Readiness ..... Wayne Akins

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Monitoring ..... Fred Page

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Performance Outcomes ..... Fred Page

Summary ..... Wayne Akins

ACCOMMODATING STUDENT TEACHERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Does the involvement of student teachers with disabilities in clinical settings indicate a need for accommodations? Two features are essential for consideration: (1) identification and involvement of all stakeholders; and (2) structure for implementing the entire student teaching process. These features will offer structure for development of this paper.

Introduction

Student teachers with disabilities are very much a part of the student teaching population. Their participation in this capstone experience is guaranteed by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), both of which require postsecondary institutions to provide students in this protected class with an equal educational opportunity. The provision of such an opportunity is accomplished through the development and implementation of accommodations. Accommodations should: (1) be developed by all stakeholders involved in the experience; (2) meet a number of legal standards outlined in ADA; and (3) meet the legal standard of reasonable, meaning duties considered essential job functions cannot be "accommodated away."

These reasonable accommodations should only be made for qualified students (students who, with reasonable accommodations, can perform essential job functions). These accommodations should also be readily achievable (in terms of difficulty and expense involved in implementation), and should not constitute an undue hardship (a balance between nature and cost of an accommodation versus the financial resources of a covered entity) for institutions.

Case Law

As the ADA evolved through litigation, a body of case law developed, providing us with guidelines specifically related to student teaching. The following four cases are helpful when making decisions about student teachers with disabilities:

Ohio Civil Rights Commission vs. Case Western Reserve University

Finding: A school has no obligation to substantially modify a practicum experience

in order to allow a person with a disability to earn a degree (involved a blind student in medical school) (Ohio Civil Rights Commission, 1998).

E.G. Grantham vs. Moffett

Finding: Institutions may not prevent students with disabilities from entering clinical programs based on assumptions about the condition (involved a deaf student who was not allowed to participate in student teaching, and resulted in a $181,000 judgement for the plaintiff) (Grantham, 1996, 1998) .

Amir vs. Saint Louis University

Finding: Students may be released from clinical setting for poor performance, even if the performance is due to limitations arising from the disabling condition (involved a medical student with Obsessive-Compulsive disorder) (Amir, 1998).

Palmer vs. Circuit Court of Cook County

Finding: Arising in an employment setting, this case concerns employee misconduct, and finds that such conduct, even as a manifestation of a disability, is not protected under ADA (Palmer, 1997).

Conceptualization of Disabilities and Provisions

In most instances, those entering student teaching have been associated with disability service providers throughout their postsecondary experience. This previous relationship, enables an efficient transition into student teaching. In keeping with statutory requirements, an extensive range of services are available for these students in pre-clinical settings. In Georgia, disability service providers are required to gather data on students in ten distinct disability categories.

Accommodations may vary among students but the following accommodations prevail within these categories; Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) benefit from additional time on examinations, use word processors for writing assignments, calculators for mathematics exams, and often require books in alternative format and notetakers. Students with Attention Deficit

Disorder (ADD) require additional time for tests and take tests in a distraction-free environment. Students with both ADD and LD may require a combination of appropriate services. Students with visual impairments require texts in alternative formats, tactile maps, graphs and charts, and tests presented orally. Students with hearing impairments may require sign-language interpreters, assistive listening devices, or notetakers. Students with Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) require accommodations similar to students with LD and ADD. Students with mobility problems require accommodations related to path-of-travel and accessibility concerns, as well as possible assistance with notetaking and in laboratory settings. Students with psychological disabilities also benefit from additional time and quiet rooms for tests. Students with chronic medical conditions often require an array of services, as well as flexible attendance policies. And finally, students with multiple disabilities require extensive accommodations to ameliorate the impact of their medical conditions and learning challenges on academics.

Student Teaching Stakeholders

Stakeholders for the student teaching experience represent a wide range of interests. From the University, these include: student teacher, Director of Office of Disabilities, Dean, Associate Dean for External Relations, program coordinator for field experiences, and University attorney. P-12 stakeholders are the prospective supervising teacher, clinical associate and principal. Community stakeholders include representatives from Rehabilitative Services. The student teacher is the focus of accommodations and is the catalyst for the initiation of appropriate supportive actions.

Readiness

Adequate preparation is a significant element in the process and outcome of the experience. Focused dialogue, with needs of the prospective student teacher as the primary consideration, is an initial and critical ingredient. After the prospective student teacher has declared a disability and the disability service provider has specified accommodations, necessary information is channeled to the Associate Dean of External Relations, College of Education. Receipt of this information results in the Director of Disabilities and associate dean meeting with the University attorney. In this meeting, the attorney reviews steps that have been taken in determining appropriateness of accommodations

and also reviews proposed steps that are planned for enactment of the accommodations. At this point, three steps have been taken: (1) declaration of disability by the prospective student teacher, (2) review of declaration and accommodation recommendation by the Office of Disabilities, and (3) meeting with University attorney for procedure validation. Usually, these steps precede student teaching by an academic year.

A new mission surfaces: clarification for all stakeholders of the application expectancy for the specified accommodations. Understanding their meaning and impact is a critical aspect of the student teaching experience. In keeping with the law and in the spirit of support for the individual, it is essential for a clear understanding to prevail that accommodations pertain to support for the student teacher in the provision of a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate effectiveness. Accommodations do not, however, alter expectations for the experience, expectations that are a common thread for all participants.

Pre-Support

Pre-support takes place months prior to beginning the experience and involves interaction of all stakeholders. In this component, particular needs of the student teacher are clarified and a dialogue transpires to develop a setting that will offer the student teacher a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate effectiveness. In pre-support, appropriate accommodations and support systems are determined based on the functional limitations created by the disabling condition. Particular care should be taken, beginning at this point, to establish clear evidence that team members have followed what appellate courts term as a "deliberative process", that demonstrates a "good faith effort"aimed at providing the student with an equal opportunity for success.

At this point, it often becomes clear that accommodations that have been effective in the classroom will not transfer into clinical settings. For example, there is no additional time for student teaching, nor can student teaching be accomplished in a distraction-free setting. In these situations, students must be made aware of their need to make extensive preparations in advance, and understand that this advance preparation takes the place of former accommodations. Otherwise, many other accommodations should be considered for implementation. Students with LD should still have unlimited access to a word processor, and may need texts in alternative formats. Visually

impaired students may need tactile material, or access to enlargement technology, such as a CCTV, readily available in the classroom. Students with hearing impairments will need amplification devices, or sign-language interpreters may act as communication aids.

In establishing a clinical setting, a priority list of prospective supervising teachers is developed. The associate dean contacts principals to learn of their support in hosting the student teacher. In this component, particular needs of the student teacher are clarified and dialogue transpires to determine whether this is a setting that will offer the student teacher a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate effectiveness. With the principal's support, and the participation of the prospective supervising teacher, the setting is finalized and more specific steps are taken in furthering the student teaching process.

In the pre-support stage, an important element is familiarity with the physical setting for the prospective student teacher. In concert with the supervising teacher, the Director of the Office of Disabilities, coordinates a site visit for the student teacher. A guided thorough inspection of the facility is provided by the supervising teacher. The purpose of this tour is five-fold: first, it enables students to learn routes, scout barriers, and to resolve any path of travel issues. Another important element of an advance visit is to establish procedures and accommodations for accomplishing routine tasks, such as using the phone, signing in, and making copies. Third, duties are discussed and accommodations made so that student teachers with disabilities can participate in traditional tasks such as hall monitoring, restroom monitoring, and taking the roll. Fourth, with the assistance of the supervising teacher, we are able to identify textbooks and begin producing them into alternative formats. Also, stakeholders rely heavily on representatives from Georgia's Division of Rehabilitation Services to take full responsibility for the student's transportation needs. Finally, this pre-visit offers an initial opportunity in relationship building for the student teacher and supervising teacher. With the exchange of e-mail addresses, communication after the visit continues.

Support

Support takes place with the beginning of the experience. Initially, primary stakeholders participate: student teacher, supervising teacher, university supervisor, office of disabilities, and the associate dean. On an as needed basis, others become involved. Again, the legal perspective in this

phase becomes important. In the support phase, those actively involved in mentoring, teaching, and correcting student teachers must be experts in their field. This phase of the process is highly subjective, depending on the strengths and weaknesses of the student. While the courts grant wide deference to institutions in these circumstances, the expertise of stakeholders should be clear if decisions made by them are ever challenged.

At the on-set of the semester, a conference is conducted in the school setting. This exchange of ideas serves as an orientation for the primary stakeholders, including the student teacher, supervising teacher, university supervisor, Director of Office of Disabilities and associate dean. At this point, the student teaching experience is officially underway with clarification of role responsibilities and expectancies having been carefully clarified for all stakeholders.

The monitoring stage is characterized by on-site supervisory visits and conferences. On a weekly basis, the university supervisor, Director of Office of Disabilities and associate dean conduct observation and post-observation conferences. These visits are conducted independently by the university supervisor and associate dean, with the director serving as a participant in each of the sessions. The frequency of these on-site visits may be reduced as the student teacher consistently demonstrates confidence and success.

Monitoring

Monitoring is an ongoing feature after the experience has begun. Primary participants are those involved in *support*, with the addition of the clinical associate. The clinical associate is a P-12 educator, usually a classroom teacher, selected jointly by the system's administration and university academic department. The associate serves as a participating partner in the student teacher's supervision.

In the monitoring stage, communication is a critical element. Communication from those serving in supervisory capacities is channeled to the student teacher, as well as among supervisors. This flow of information is an essential support feature for the student teacher and serves as a focusing agent for supervisory tasks.

The Director of the Office of Disabilities is a significant contributor in the monitoring phase. First, that individual has a long-standing support relationship with the student teacher. Second, the

expertise of the director is vital in monitoring consistency of the applied accommodations.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an ongoing element with stakeholder participation mirroring the *monitoring* phase. The primary feature is a qualitative description of the student teacher's development. In the evaluation, student teacher performance is the focus. There can be a tendency to incorporate the element of accommodations in the evaluation process. Caution is in order for supervisors to be mindful that accommodations were implemented within legal standards to offer an opportunity for the student teacher to perform essential job functions. The accommodations, however, are not an element of consideration in the student teacher's performance.

For the student teacher with disabilities, as with all student teachers, the evaluation process will result in a qualitative performance description: success or failure. The final qualitative descriptor should not be a surprise to the student teacher or for any of the stakeholders. It is simply an outcome of numerous observations and conversations, all in which the student teacher has participated.

Performance Outcomes

Success

Success is a description applied to a student teaching experience in which the performance has consistently met, or exceeded, minimal standards. In keeping with the spirit of development, for most student teachers, there were performances that failed to meet predetermined expectations. However, those occasions were minimal and the overall picture a positive one. At the conclusion of a successful experience, the student teacher is assigned a grade of "pass." This grade, along with the completion of all other course requirements, entitle the student teacher to be recommended for graduation and full professional certification.

Failure

Failure is a description applied to a student teaching experience in which the performance has consistently failed to meet minimal expectancies. This outcome has been preceded by an

extensive team approach to support and supervision involving: supervising teacher, university supervisor, principal, clinical associate, Director of Office of Disabilities, and associate dean.

Additionally, as prescribed in the University's student teacher handbook, three formal notifications of need are developed: (1) Performance Agreement; (2) Probationary Status; and (3) Termination Process (Page, 2001). Each of these steps is characterized by need identification and a time-table for monitoring and evaluating. These written, formal agreements are signed in the conference by participating stakeholders. When failure occurs, the student teacher does not complete course requirements, and, therefore, is not eligible for graduation or recommendation for professional certification.

The supervision team, along with the student teacher, meet to decide on a future option that seems to be most closely associated with the student teacher's needs. As described in the student teaching handbook, four options, as described below, exist.

1. The Student Teacher is eligible to enroll in student teaching the next academic term.
2. Prior to enrolling in another student teaching experience, the student must enroll in and successfully complete a practicum experience the next academic term. It is set up, supervised and evaluated by the academic department in which the student is majoring. Successful completion of the practicum establishes eligibility for the student to enroll in student teaching the next academic term.
3. Prior to enrolling in another student teaching experience, the student must enroll in and successfully complete recommended academic courses. These courses may be content related or in Education. Successful completion of the recommended courses establishes eligibility for the student to enroll in student teaching the next academic term.

   Suggested courses:_____
4. The option of earning a degree in General Studies or other academic degree is considered. (Page)

Structure for all stakeholders is the critical ingredient. Thoughtful implementation offers the student teacher an opportunity to develop skills considered essential job functions.

Summary

Students with disabilities are guaranteed participation opportunity in student teaching by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), both of which require post-secondary institutions to provide students in this protected class with an equal educational opportunity. This legislation is but an initial step in the provision and implementation of student teaching for disabled students. Equally important are role clarifications for all stakeholders and stages of development and operation for the student teaching process. Following the steps and spirit of the law will provide disabled student teachers an opportunity to perform essential job functions.

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